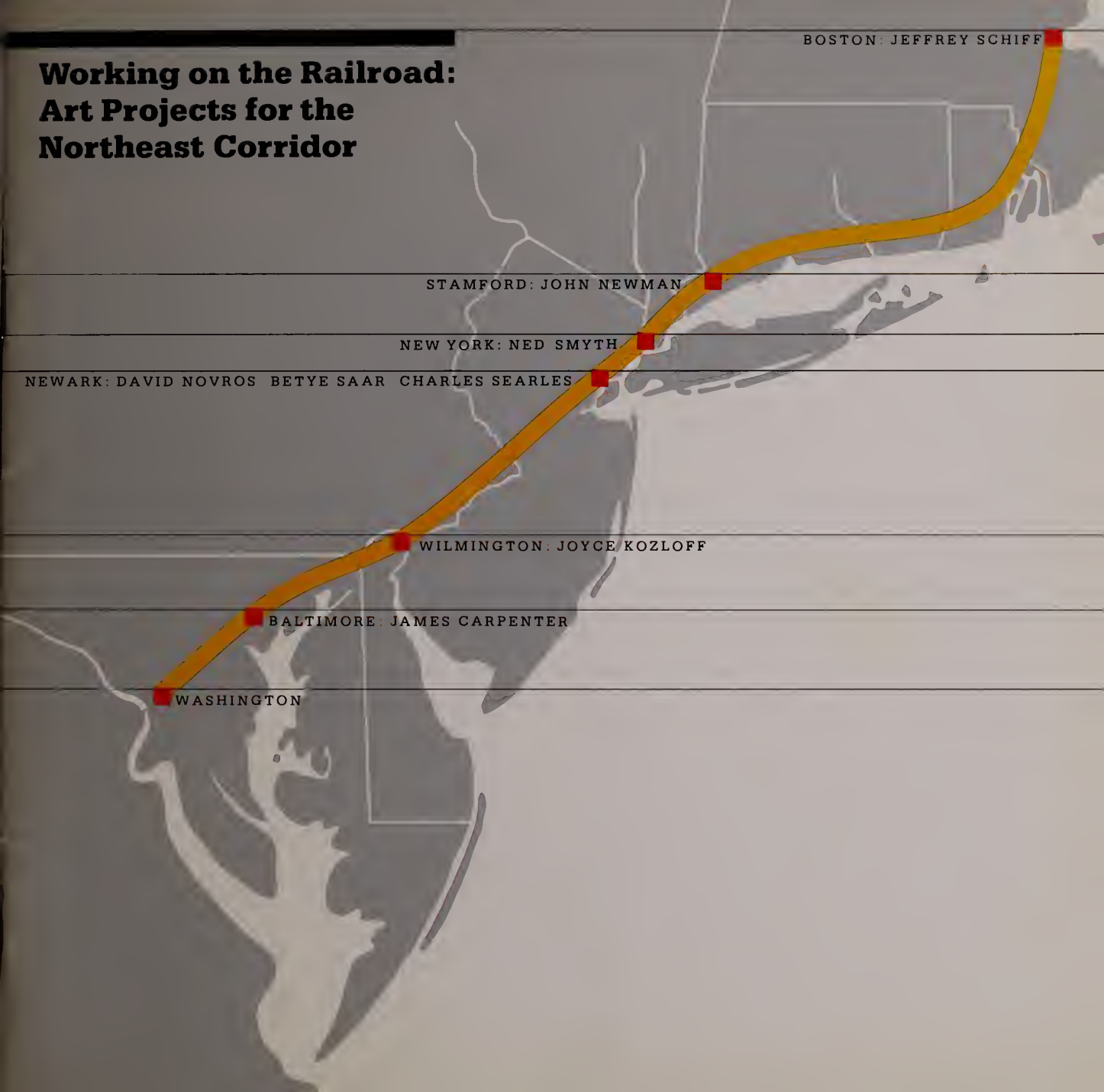
Working on the Railroad: Art Projects for the Northeast Corridor



"Working on the Railroad" was organized by Pamela Gruninger Perkins, Branch Director, Whitney Museum of American Art, Fairfield County. This exhibition would not have been possible without the gracious assistance of Marilyn Jordan Taylor and Lee Carlson, both of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Washington, D.C. Appreciation is also extended to the artists for the time they took to discuss their projects and for their contributions to this publication.

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Working on the Railroad

ART PROJECTS FOR THE NORTHEAST CORRIDOR

Like all public artworks, the projects for the northeast corridor train stations have been realized through a complex procedure involving many groups of people over a long period of time. In 1976, Congress established the Northeast Corridor Improvement Project with the goal of improving the speed and dependability of railroad passenger service between Washington, D.C., and Boston, Massachusetts. The United States Department of Transportation through the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is implementing the improvement project. DeLeuw, Cather/Parsons (DCP), under contract to the FRA, is responsible for engineering design, procurement, and construction management. The Washington, D.C., office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), as a subcontractor to DCP, is responsible for preparing preliminary design plans for each of the stations (originally fifteen, now thirteen), and for supervising the development of final design documents prepared by local architecture and engineering firms. As part of the design renovation, three quarters of one percent of the budget was set aside for commissioning works of art for the stations. SOM is overseeing the selection, fabrication, and installation of the artworks.

This exhibition is concerned with eight projects in six of the stations. Of the eight, works by James Carpenter, Joyce Kozloff, David Novros, Betye Saar, and Charles Searles have already been installed. John Newman's sculptures have been fabricated and are awaiting installation, pending the completion of the new Stamford Station. Jeffrey Schiff's sculpture for Boston's South Station is scheduled to be installed in 1986 at the earliest. Ned Smyth's proposal for New York's Pennsylvania Station may never be realized because all major improvements at the station have been suspended while Amtrak investigates ways to maximize retail possibilities and reconfigure passenger facilities. As a result, the space where Smyth's sculpture would have been placed may be used for other purposes.

Each of the artists was selected by a panel of three arts professionals. In 1978–79, Patricia Fuller, at that time coordinator of the Art in Public Places Program at the National Endowment for the Arts, organized an artist-selection panel for each station. The panelists then recommended the artists. Marilyn Jordan Taylor of SOM contacted the artists who were selected and invited them to submit proposals after visiting the site and discussing the budget with her. Final approval was given on the basis of the artist's proposal, usually in the form of a model. In some cases the artist was asked to revise the proposal. Apart from the approval process, a number of projects underwent significant transformation between the time the artists submitted their proposals and the time the work was actually fabricated. This evolution is most clearly illustrated in the work of John Newman.

In devising their projects, the artists had to consider influential factors such as the amount of money at their disposal, the location of the work in the station, the existing architecture, the method of fabrication and installation, and who the audience might be. The results are characteristically diverse. Following are excerpts from the artists' statements about their projects.

Pamela Gruninger Perkins

James Carpenter

BALTIMORE PENNSYLVANIA STATION

Model for three windows, 1980.

Artist Selection Panelists: David Hanks, Diane Jacquot, Phoebe Stanton
Assistants: Peter Drobny, Dan Reiser, Thermon Statom
Project Status: Installed 1983

There are three windows located at the end of the concourse at the Baltimore Pennsylvania Station. The windows are subdivided into panels, which consist of 8-inch-square tiles. Each tile is individually cast with a convex interior and a concave lensing system on the exterior to refract light. In this sense, the panels are not only decorative but functional because they gather light from the outside and bring it into the concourse area.

J.C.

Joyce Kozloff

W I L M I N G T O N S T A T I O N

View of vestibule, 1984.

Artist Selection Panelists: Rowland Elzea, Nina Felshin, Janet Kardon
Studio Assistant: Julie Tesser
Project Status: Installed 1984

The Wilmington Station was designed in 1908 by Frank Furness, one of several American architects who merged Gothic architectural devices with an integral program of ornamentation derived from organic forms. The entrance hall of the station measures 30 feet long by 20 feet wide, with a ceiling height ranging from 14 feet to 8 feet as travelers climb the stairs that lead to the central hall. I decorated all wall surfaces of this vestibule with a complex array of patterns fabricated in low-fire ceramic tile. The basic structure was inspired by Furness' occasional use of horizontal bands of patterns. The hexagonal and diamond pattern on the bottom of the two main walls leading to the stairs was taken from Furness' wall decorations for the main banking room of the now-demolished Provident Life and Trust Company in Philadelphia. Other motifs of the main walls were located in tiled floor and wall patterns from Furness homes. The colors, which recall plant-embellished lattice walls, were inspired by Victorian painting and decorative arts. I invented additional patterns for the vestibule—most notably the interlocking diamonds on the short wall between the entrance doors—which have the same carnival-like spirit that dominates the main walls. Furness is directly referenced in a series of large diamond-shaped tiles that contain collaged images from architectural ornament on Furness buildings and fragments from his sketchbook. J.K.

David Novros

N E W A R K P E N N S Y L V A N I A S T A T I O N

View of painting, 1984.

Artist Selection Panelists: Benny Andrews, Samuel Hunter, Richard Koshalek
Technical Assistance: Richard Dant and Zome Works Corporation, Albuquerque; Steve Baer, President
Project Status: Installed 1984

I have developed a painting which hangs in the arch above the train signboard in the main waiting room of the Newark Pennsylvania Station. The painting is made of five aluminum-faced, honeycombed panels 1½ inches thick. As the sunlight increases and decreases, the painting opens and closes by means of hinges which are operated by a series of gears attached to an electric motor powered by a photovoltaic mechanism on the roof of the station. The paint for this work is a combination of Rustoleum and oils. I have conceived the painting as a unique work, relating specifically to the light, architecture, and social circumstances of the train station. I am interested in an observation of nature through light. What I find in the course of my work necessarily mirrors specific conflicts between mechanical time and nature, between color and light, between night and day, and so on. I hope this painting will be a kind of ongoing dance for Newark . . . that its motion and content will fill the arch with an activity that is accessible to everyone. D.N.

Betye Saar

NEWARK PENNSYLVANIA STATION

View of mural, 1984.

Artist Selection Panelists: Benny Andrews, Samuel Hunter, Richard Koshalek
Assistants: Nancy Fasciani, Hiram Holzer, Sunglee Lee, Alison Saar
Project Status: Installed 1984

The mural *Fast Trax* is a stylistic design conveying the excitement of rail transportation past, present, and future. I was inspired by the Art Deco architecture of the Newark Pennsylvania Station as designed by the firm McKim, Mead & White in the early 1930s. The mural is made up of five 4-foot by 4-foot panels, depicting the energy and movement of rail transportation through vivid metallic colors and the pattern of objects scattered on its surface. I selected objects for the mural, such as model trains, animals, and stars, to represent nature, people, and things transported on trains and also to symbolize the sense of joy associated with rail transportation in the United States.

B.S.

Charles Searles

NEWARK PENNSYLVANIA STATION

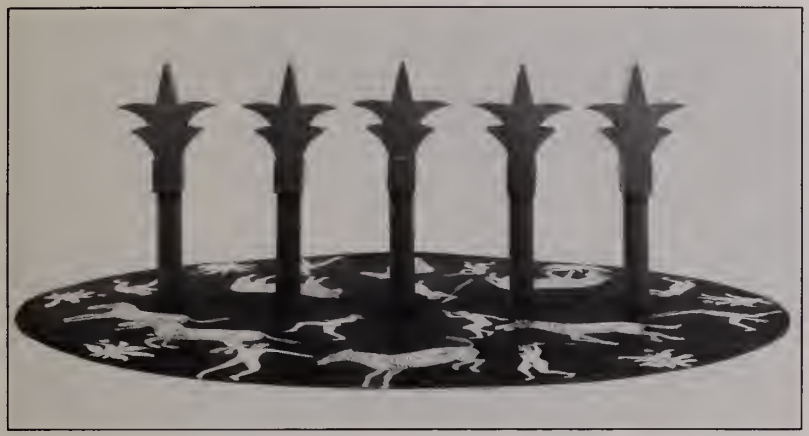
Second-stage model for wall relief sculpture, 1983.

Artist Selection Panelists: Benny Andrews, Samuel Hunter, Richard Koshalek
Fabricators: P. Feiner & Sons, Inc., Bogota, New Jersey; and Charles Seplowin
Project Status: Installed 1985

For the past several years I have been working with wall-floor sculpture and wall sculpture. The main concept of the sculpture is curved planes. The curved sections are rhythmic relief forms with flat ends that touch the walls, while the center of the curves roll forward away from the walls. The forms are abstracted from dancers. I have been playing percussion for dancers over the past dozen years, and I have been influenced by music, dance forms, and movements. When the opportunity came for me to do a major wall sculpture I was excited about projecting one of my "Rhythmic Forms" as the idea. Dance is an integral part of all cultures, and people everywhere can relate to it. Color is also a major part of my artistic statement. I try to arrange my colors so that they vibrate off each other, a device that reinforces the movement of the rhythmic dance forms. In essence, the sculpture in the station is dancing across the wall to the sound of some distant music or the rhythmic sounds of the train wheels. C.S.

Ned Smyth

NEW YORK PENNSYLVANIA STATION



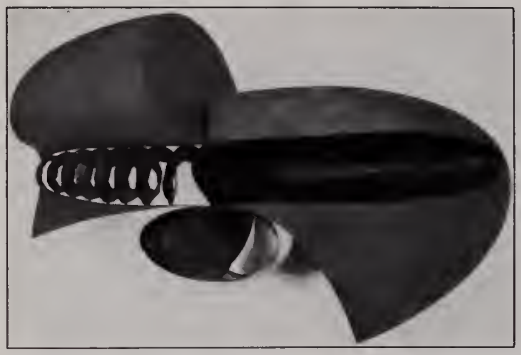
Model for sculpture, 1981.

Artist Selection Panelists: David Katzive, Richard Koshalek, Marcia Tucker
Project Status: Pending final approval

The sculpture I have proposed for the oval ticket room of New York's Pennsylvania Station is an arcade of five 17-foot-high glass mosaic palm columns surrounded by an oval 55-foot by 40-foot marble mosaic floor. In designing this sculpture, I felt there were four qualities that the piece should have. First, it should reflect a sense of history and grandeur. The original station, a neoclassical structure, was modeled on the Baths of Caracalla in Rome. Its massive columns, high ceilings, and glass-covered tracks had such a strong effect on the public that it became a landmark of the city. I wanted to instill some of this monumental scale into its successor, a characterless underground mall. Second, the sculpture should make a focal point for the station. Third, it should serve as a spectacle and drama that balances the importance of one of the most heavily traveled stations in the United States. It should not be just a single object, but an environment that the public passes through and explores. The floor has two different scenes separated by the arcade. One depicts a pastoral setting with men and women playing flutes and tending a herd of zebras. The other scene has an active, aggressive tone with men and women hunting zebras. Lastly, New York City, as a center for culture, communications, style, and finance, has a responsibility to influence and educate the rest of the world. Public art should communicate with, not alienate, the public. The goal of this installation is to touch as many people as possible with a sense of art, history, spectacle, drama, joy, and spirit. N.S.

John Newman

S T A M F O R D S T A T I O N



Air Screw, 1984.

Slow Commotion, 1984.

Artist Selection Panelists: Tracy Atkinson, Suzanne Delehanty, David von Schlegell
Project Status: Projected installation 1985–86
Executed at : Malleable Metals, Bethany, Connecticut; Bob Giza, Chief Fabricator

The project for the Stamford Station is the first public commission I have received. At the same time, I had just started working with a fabricator of large-scale steel sculpture. Receiving the commission allowed me to produce a larger, more complex, volumetric piece than I had previously done. Working with the architect, I chose the site—a wall at the head of the escalators leading into the station—for the element of surprise that would be created as the ascending viewer spied the work. The sculpture is actually two elements—one hanging high up on the wall and one resting beneath it on the floor. Part of the reason for doing two pieces is that I have always been interested in pairs. Pairs naturally set up a situation of comparison: How is this different from that? I like the idea of there being a dialogue between the two sculptures, a challenge that will encourage the viewer to look more closely at the situation. The sculptures' forms are derived from both mathematical structures and naturalistic forms. My earlier work was primarily geometric in form, but I started to move away from that and began to incorporate curved surfaces. For me rounded forms have a greater range of emotion and association. To create these sculptures I worked directly with ⅛-inch-thick steel. I did not make a model beforehand but worked from full-scale drawings. First, I shaped the individual forms for each part and then had them welded together. The rust color is the result of my controlling the natural rusting process with a chemical. The black is old-fashioned stove black used to blacken cast iron items. For me color in sculpture is a way to isolate areas and establish priorities of attention. I purposely do not want color to overshadow my primary concern, which is complexity of form and the range of meanings associated with it. J.N.

Jeffrey Schiff

B O S T O N S O U T H S T A T I O N

Prototype for sculpture, 1983.

Artist Selection Panelists: Carl Belz, Hugh Davies, Elisabeth Sussman
Project Status: Projected installation 1986–87

The proposed sculpture is intended to restate the condition of journey. It functions as a metaphor for the place in which it is located, amidst the activity that inspired it. Integrated into the enormous space of the concourse, the sculpture is scaled for the individual, providing a concentrated, solitary experience of passage and a refuge from the commercial activities surrounding it. The concerns and forms of the sculpture are responses to the building itself. The entrance corridor establishes the main directional axis, effectively channeling pedestrian vision and movement. At the entrance to the concourse, that focus is diffused—the space broadens on both sides and above, and diverse activities animate all corners of the room. Directly ahead, the sculpture provides an inlaid granite path that re-establishes the axis. The granite path is narrow, leading to a broad rectangular enclosure within a grove of granite columns. The rectangular enclosure is defined by low walls of lightly textured granite blocks. Rising both within and beyond the enclosure, twelve 10½-foot-high drilled and split granite columns are angled to the axis of departure, the angle on which the train tracks are set. The erratic locations of the columns suggest the random order of trees in a natural forest and express the diverse possibilities for directional movement. The sculpture and the railroad station share the same terminus—the train itself. Upon emerging from the grove and enclosure, the traveler faces the train and the doors to either side that provide access to it.

J.S.

Works in the Exhibition

Dimensions are in inches; height precedes width precedes depth.

James Carpenter (b. 1949)
Project for three windows for Baltimore Pennsylvania Station, 1980–83

Model, 1980
Wood, 12 x 25½ x 16¾
United States Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration, Washington, D.C.

Cast glass panel prototype, 1980–81
Steel and glass, 109 x 20 x 1½
Collection of the artist

Elevation drawing, 1983
Pencil on paper, 30 x 44½
Collection of the artist

Elevation drawing, 1983
Pencil on paper, 30 x 44½
Collection of the artist

Joyce Kozloff (b. 1942)
Homage to Frank Furness
Project for vestibule for Wilmington Station, 1980–84

First-stage drawing, left elevation, 1980
Pencil on graph paper, 22½ x 32¾
Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

First-stage drawing, right elevation, 1980
Pencil on graph paper, 22 x 32
Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

Working drawings, 1981–82
Pen and pencil on paper, 32 x 42 overall
Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

Second-stage model, 1982
Cardboard, colored pencil, and collage, 10¼ x 20 x 15
United States Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration, Washington, D.C.

Sample tile, 1984
Glazed hand-painted ceramic tile on plywood, 24 x 24
Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

John Newman (b. 1952)
Air Screw and *Slow Commotion*
Project for two sculptures for Stamford Station, 1981–84

First-stage drawing, 1981
Scratchboard, 40 x 26
United States Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration, Washington, D.C.

First-stage model, 1981
Gesso on cardboard, 40 x 25 x 7
United States Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration, Washington, D.C.

First-stage drawing, 1982
Scratchboard, 28 x 40
United States Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration, Washington, D.C.

First-stage model, 1982
Gesso on cardboard, 20 x 41 x 6¼
United States Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration, Washington, D.C.

Shop drawing for *Air Screw*, 1984
Chalk and oil stick on paper, 52 x 82½
Daniel Weinberg Gallery, Los Angeles

Shop drawing for *Slow Commotion,* 1984
Chalk, oil stick, and graphite on paper, 67 x 120
Collection of Phil Schrager

Study for *Air Screw,* 1984
Pencil on graph paper, 36 x 36
Collection of the artist

Study for *Slow Commotion,* 1984
Pencil on graph paper, 42 x 51
Collection of the artist

Air Screw, 1984
Treated steel, 53 x 88 x 34
United States Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration, Washington, D.C.

David Novros (b. 1941)
Project for painting for Newark Pennsylvania Station, 1981–84

Northeast corner wall study, begun 1975
Oil and acrylic on rice paper, 72 x 120
Collection of the artist

Drawing, 1984
Mixed media on paper, 22 x 30
T.R.H. Prince and Princess Michael of Greece

Drawing, 1984
Mixed media on paper, 22 x 30
T.R.H. Prince and Princess Michael of Greece

Betye Saar (b. 1926)
Fast Trax
Project for mural for Newark Pennsylvania Station, 1982–84

First-stage drawing, 1982
Mixed media on paper mounted on cardboard, 5¾ x 23
United States Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration, Washington, D.C.

Second-stage drawing, 1982
Mixed media on paper mounted on cardboard, 10 x 28
United States Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration, Washington, D.C.

Detail of second-stage drawing, 1982
Mixed media on cardboard, 14⅛ x 14
United States Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration, Washington, D.C.

Second-stage model, 1982
Cardboard and paint, 5⅜ x 12⅝ x 5⅜
United States Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration, Washington, D.C.

Working drawing, 1984
Watercolor and glitter on paper, 9¾ x 32½
Collection of the artist

Jeffrey Schiff (b. 1952)
Project for sculpture for Boston South Station, 1980–83

Floor plan, 1982
Diazo print, 42 x 17¼
Collection of the artist, courtesy Stux Gallery, Boston

Drawing, 1983
Charcoal on paper, 36 x 48
Collection of the artist, courtesy Stux Gallery, Boston

Color photocopy of mock-up, 1983
Color photocopy, 8 x 10
Collection of the artist, courtesy Stux Gallery, Boston

Color photocopy of mock-up, 1983
Color photocopy, 8 x 10
Collection of the artist, courtesy Stux Gallery, Boston

Color photocopy of mock-up, 1983
Color photocopy, 8 x 10
Collection of the artist, courtesy Stux Gallery, Boston

Sample granite for column, no date
Stony Creek granite, 5 x 11 x 3
Collection of the artist

Sample granite for wall and walkway, no date
Carnelian granite, 6 x 6 x 2
Collection of the artist

Charles Searles (b. 1937)
Rhythmic Forms
Project for wall relief sculpture for Newark Pennsylvania Station, 1983–85

First-stage model, 1983
Paint on paper, 5½ x 27
United States Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration, Washington, D.C.

Second-stage model, 1983
Paint on paper, 5½ x 27
United States Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration, Washington, D.C.

Working drawing, 1984
Paint on paper, 7¾ x 23¾
Collection of the artist

Ned Smyth (b. 1948)
Hunting and Herding
Project for sculpture for Newark Pennsylvania Station, 1981

Model, 1981
Ink and graphite on mylar with wood columns, 17 x 53 x 40½
Collection of the artist, courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

Drawing of Shepherd's Head, 1981
Ink and graphite on mylar, 24 x 24
Collection of the artist, courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

Mosaic of Shepherd's Head, 1981
Marble mosaic, 24 x 24 x 2
Collection of the artist, courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

Sample mosaic for columns, 1981
Glass mosaic, 20½ x 11½ x 2
Collection of the artist, courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

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